

T The New York Times Style Magazine

For Faye Toogood, the Rough Draft Is Also the Final Product

The British designer's new collection of furniture embraces the "rawness and primitive qualities" of small-scale models.

By Samuel Rutter
March 18, 2020



Toogood with her "Maquette 270/Wire & Card Chair" (2020), photographed at her studio in London on Jan. 23, 2020. Credit...Photo by Philip Sinden, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

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The British designer Faye Toogood is best known for her elegant explorations of the simplest of forms: Her Roly-Poly chair combines a tilted, bowl-like seat with four squat legs, and her Element table consists of a glass panel that rests on a sphere, a cylinder and a cube. The former, in particular, is considered a classic of contemporary design, and forms part of the permanent collections of museums around the world. But despite (or perhaps because of) this, Toogood, 43, has been attempting to move in an entirely different direction. Works from her latest collection, “Assemblage 6: Unlearning,” will go on view at New York’s Friedman Benda gallery in September.



A selection of the handmade maquettes that informed Toogood’s new series. Credit...Photo by Angus Mill, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

To change her work, Toogood changed her process. The show will comprise 13 realized design pieces — including an aluminum armchair that looks like folded paper and a lumpy canvas-and-foam sofa with an unfinished hem — and at least as many maquettes. Toogood has long worked with maquettes, or preliminary miniature models made from castoff materials. Here, though, she placed them at the center of her project by creating full-size furniture pieces that are otherwise nearly exact copies of her prototypes, which range from three to six inches tall or wide, honoring their rough-hewn look and accepting whatever problems of proportion arose during their enlargement. “It was about committing to the maquette, doggedly sticking to its naïveté, to its rawness and primitive qualities,” said Toogood, speaking from her studio in East London. An

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uneven box stool, for example, is made of cast bronze painted to mimic corrugated cardboard. And to approximate the appearance of the masking tape she'd used on a maquette of a floor lamp — both versions feature two bases, one spherical and one moundlike, connected by a thin cord — Toogood dipped canvas strips into a mixture of fiberglass and resin.



Toogood's "Maquette 234/Canvas & Foam Sofa" (2020). Credit...Photo by Angus Mill, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

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Toogood's "Maquette 72/Masking Tape Light" (2020). Credit...Photo by Angus Mill, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

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Toogood's "Maquette 16/Box Stool" (2020). Credit...Photo by Angus Mill, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

Not every scaled reproduction proved successful, but the “unlearning” the designer was after happened alongside the inevitable turns and false starts on the way to what she calls pure creativity. Toogood believes that the world of contemporary design can at times resemble a hall of mirrors, where the constant barrage of images leads to designs that are overly referential. To escape this, she sought a way to go back into herself and reconnect with her inner child. She noted that children are all born as artists, and that there’s a type of creativity associated with play that seems to fall by the wayside as we grow older. It’s no coincidence, then, that the concept for the show came to Toogood shortly after she gave birth to twins two years ago. For her, motherhood has been transformative: “Having children made me feel more creative than I’ve ever felt before,” she said. “It’s been a revelation.”

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